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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000470

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [TN](#)

SUBJECT: TONGA MILITARY COMMANDER FRUSTRATED WITH HIS
GOVERNMENT'S INDECISION ON IRAQ DEPLOYMENT

REF: SUVA 389

Classified By: AMBASSADOR LARRY M. DINGER. SECTIONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Commander of the Tonga Defense Services (TDS), BG Tau'aika Uta'atu, told us he has become increasingly frustrated with the inability of his government to decide whether the TDS should deploy a second time in Iraq. Uta'atu firmly believes a deployment would be in the best interests of the TDS and Tonga. Consideration of the Iraq deployment has been delayed by a combination of PM Sevele's concerns about a return to Iraq and the need to put the issue on hold during the mourning period following the King's death. The next scheduled Defense Board meeting, where the deployment is set to be discussed, is scheduled for November 24, after BG Uta'atu returns from the CHOD conference in Kuala Lumpur. It remains anybody's guess whether the oft-postponed meeting will actually take place as scheduled. In the meantime, the TDS is going forward with a deployment to the RAMSI force in the Solomons later this month. End Summary.

The TDS Wants to Move Forward, but the PM has Concerns

¶2. (C) Brigadier General Tau'aika Uta'atu told visiting DCM and EAP/ANP desk officer October 30 he is anxious for a governmental decision on going forward with a second deployment to Iraq. Uta'atu said the oft-postponed meeting of the Defense Board to decide whether to go forward with a deployment is scheduled for November 24, after Uta'atu returns from the Chief of Defense (CHOD) conference in Kuala Lumpur.

¶3. (C) Uta'atu believes the benefits for the TDS and Tonga are clear-cut. Tonga will forge a closer relationship with the United States and other coalition partners and will be well positioned to play a larger role in international peacekeeping operations. The TDS will receive the training and equipment it needs to upgrade its forces. The training opportunities soldiers receive will not only make them better soldiers, it will give them job skills they can use the rest of their lives in Tonga or overseas.

¶4. (C) The TDS prepared a paper recommending deployment back in May, he noted. Unfortunately, because of a series of delays, the paper has not yet been submitted to the Tonga Defense Board for review. Some delays have been inevitable, given busy travel schedules and especially the need to put the process on hold after the death of the King. But the major problem, said Uta'atu, has been uncertainty about the deployment expressed by PM Sevele. Uta'atu said Acting

Defense Minister Tua is reluctant to bring the deployment proposal forward for a Defense Board decision until he is sure that Sevele would support it. Various comments by Sevele have led Tua to believe that Sevele is still not fully on board. On October 28, Tua told Uta'atu he needed to speak to PM Sevele again before deciding whether to bring the deployment issue before the Defense Board. Uta'atu did not know when that conversation would occur, since Tua traveled to Vav'au October 28 and was expected to remain there most of the following week and Sevele would be out of Tonga until early November.

15. (C) Uta'atu said Sevele is especially concerned about financial aspects of the deployment. Sevele told him that the United States should be prepared to pay the extra allowances given to Tongan soldiers serving in Iraq and cover the extra insurance costs. After checking with Embassy DATT, Uta'atu informed Sevele that the U.S. would not be able to pick up those costs but argued that Sevele should focus on the benefits of deployment in Iraq - training, equipment, etc. (Comment: PM Sevele mentioned the insurance issue to the Ambassador in September. He also made it clear that his misgivings about Iraq deployment are not limited to its financial aspects. He told the Ambassador he is "looking at the political side" as well (reftel). End comment.)

Tonga Sending a Platoon to the Solomons in November

16. (C) Uta'atu said the TDS would be sending a platoon to the RAMSI contingent in the Solomons later this month. The platoon is in Australia now, preparing for the deployment, which will last three months. After February, Tonga will

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reevaluate the situation in the Solomons and decide whether to stay longer. Uta'atu noted that Australia is covering almost all the expenses of the deployment, but not insurance costs.

Comment

17. (C) We remain in a "wait and see" mode re the Government of Tonga's decision. We remain guardedly optimistic that Acting Defense Minister Tua and Uta'atu will be able to convince PM Sevele that the benefits of joining the coalition outweigh the risks. We cannot say for certain whether that will happen by November 24, or whether we'll have to keep waiting for a definitive answer.

DINGER